

## The Phenomenology of a Stalled Career: When an Organizational Undiscussable and Deficient Support Systems Impedes Sensemaking and Work Transition

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*Conditions in the U.S. have created a situation where some middle aged white males are experiencing a stalled career; they perceive they have plateaued in career progression while at the same time women and minority peers continue advancing. Based on phenomenological research methods, individuals who have experienced the non-event work transition of a stalled career describe their experience. Transitions theory is the theoretical framework for analysis. Discussion includes implications for theory and practice.*

**Keywords:** Career Development, Learning, Social Support

The United States (U.S.) has experienced substantial social, demographic, and workplace change during the last decades of the Twentieth Century. These changed environmental conditions have created a crisis in society and, particularly, in the contemporary U.S. workplace, by forcing numerous employees into an involuntary work transition. This era of unprecedented change requires a reassessment of longstanding factors and strategies related to midlife work transition and the facilitation of that transition (Sullivan, Martin, Carden, & Mainiero, 2003).

While these changes have affected all individuals, they have particularly affected males (Faludi, 1999). A new social phenomenon has emerged, described as a “male crisis” (p. 50). Birkenstein (1999) narrows the population, noting that “we have a parade of white males who appear to feel that simply being a white male should still entitle them to certain benefits...This is the true and sick sense of disenfranchisement some men feel, which we must deal with if we are to begin to understand this ongoing problem” (p. 18). This new social phenomenon is sometimes referred to as “white male backlash” (Burke & Black, 1997).

At the nexus of the changed workplace and the backlash phenomenon, some white males perceive themselves as *stalled*. In essence, such individuals consider their career to be involuntarily plateaued while at the same time perceive that women and minorities in their professional cohort continuing to advance in their career objectives. The term *stalled career* is used in this study to describe the negative perception of some white males that they are involuntarily being forced to a standstill.

### Problem Statement

There has been no research describing the experience of middle aged white males who perceive themselves as having a stalled career or its impact on the workplace. Based on anecdotal reports, the stalled career appears to be a readily recognized phenomenon. Unfortunately, the lack of empirical evidence on the stalled career is problematic. Is it only about the internal turmoil of the individual experiencing it? Does it impact human capital retention or development? Are people willing to talk about it? Does it impact mission accomplishment? Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory study is to describe the experience of middle aged white males who perceive themselves as having a stalled career and identify its impact on the workplace.

### Theoretical Framework

This exploration into adult development used Schlossberg’s (1981) model for analyzing adults in transition, as adapted in Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) as the theoretical framework. Transitions occur when “an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behavior and relationships” (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5). Transitions encompass important changes in an individual’s life. They are an undeniable part of everyone’s life, though they may be anticipated, unanticipated, or simply non-events. They occur in the workplace, as well as our non-work lives.

Transitions theory is a way to understand the stalled career work transition experience in depth. Schlossberg’s (1981) model for analyzing adults in transition shows a life transition as a form of crisis and the concept of adaptation to the crisis is central to the transitions framework. Although the transitions framework draws heavily on

the construct of critical life events (Danish, 1981), not all transitions are perceived as critical. A non-event may be marked by the non-occurrence of an anticipated life event (e.g., expected promotion, non-achievement of the Levinsonian “dream”) (Schlossberg, 1981). Rather than a critical life event, this study proposes that a stalled career represents a non-event, to which those experiencing it must learn how to cope. A white male who perceives himself as stalled is likely experiencing a non-event work transition.

The theoretical framework for life transitions explains the key factors to be studied and the presumed relationships among them when analyzing adults in transition (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). The model includes four factors: Situation (i.e., characteristics of the transition), Support (i.e., characteristics of the environment), Self (i.e., stable characteristics of the individual), and Strategies (i.e., things the individual can learn and do). The interaction (i.e., presumed relationship) between these four factors represents the transition process and leads to a positive or negative transition outcome. Schlossberg (1981) suggests assessing, at one point in time, the transitional opportunity for developmental growth or deterioration. This is accomplished by examining an individual’s resources/assets and liabilities/deficits among the 4Ss for adaptation to the life stressor at the heart of the transition. The transition outcome is the balance of the individual’s coping assets and liabilities.

### Research Question

The primary research question for this study was: How do middle aged white males who perceive themselves as having a stalled career experience this non-event work transition? Transitions theory assumes that individuals in transition use their coping resources (i.e., social support systems) to get beyond the crisis created by the transition (Schlossberg, 1981). The utilization of such mechanisms enhances the individual’s ability to navigate the stalled career transition. Where this is the case, the effect would be a coping asset balance and result in a positive transition outcome. Transitions theory suggests that middle aged white males who experience the non-event work transition of a stalled career will use their social support systems to ensure a positive transition outcome.

### Methods

Based on Creswell’s (1998) dimensions for comparing qualitative research traditions, this study uses the phenomenological research tradition because of phenomenology’s focus on understanding the essence of the experience (i.e., a stalled career) and its desired narrative form of a description of the essence of the experience. It is object-centered rather than method-centered. The phenomenological research tradition involves searching for meaning and the essences of experiences, rather than measurements and explanations (Moustakas, 1994).

#### *Research Setting and Participants*

Several conditions in the contemporary work environment are forcing individuals into work transitions, including a high rate of organizational change, downsizing, flatter organizational structures, reduction in middle management positions, and increased competition for fewer management positions (Jaffe & Scott, 1998). Because these conditions are present in the U.S. Government workplace, it served as the research setting.

The participants for the study were middle aged white males who perceived themselves as having a stalled career. The phenomenology tradition emphasizes describing the lived experience of the individual and “accessing the meaning of human phenomena as expressed through the individual” (Rudestam & Newton, 1992, p. 34). The unit of analysis for this study, therefore, was the individual. Participants came from a variety of Federal agencies.

Patton (1990) recommends a criterion-based approach to purposefully choosing study participants. The five criteria for selecting participants for this study were: 1) Federal employment, 2) 40–60 years of age, 3) white, 4) male, and 5) those who perceive themselves as having experience with a stalled career. Three primary strategies were used to identify individuals who met the criteria: formal face-to-face or telephone communications with internal contacts associated with consulting or training projects inside Federal agencies; placing a classified advertisement in *The Federal Times*; and, informal face-to-face conversations with Federally-employed white males who self-identified as experiencing a stalled career.

#### *Data Collection and Analysis*

This study used an exploratory phenomenological approach with descriptive, semi-structured questions to allow for data collection. Data collection used Seidman’s (1991) in-depth, three interview protocol. Each participant completed the series of interviews, with each interview session lasting approximately 90 minutes. The data analysis process occurred simultaneously with data collection, interpretation, and writing of the narrative (Creswell, 1994).

In the phenomenological tradition, one informed subject is enough to develop a description of the essence of the experience (Patton, 1990). Given the level of consistency evidenced in the first three participants’ transcripts, a

level of saturation in the data had been reached. Consultation with impartial observers resulted in the determination of sufficiency and the decision to stop data collection after completing the interview series with the fifth participant.

Two phases of analysis promoted a full description and the clearest understanding of the stalled career experience. First, the description of the essence of the stalled career experience resulted from data analysis using the seven-step phenomenological research process (Moustakas, 1994). The process includes horizontalization, reduction and elimination into invariant constituents, clustering into core themes, validation of the invariant constituents and themes, development of a textural description, development of a structural description, and synthesis into the final textural-structural description of the essence of the experience. The textural-structural description incorporates the invariant constituents and themes into a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the stalled career experience. Each participant reviewed the draft of his individual textural-structural description to validate its credibility. A draft composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the stalled career experience came from the individual validated textural-structural description from each participant. Each participant reviewed the draft composite description to validate its credibility in portraying the essence of the stalled career experience. Their feedback was incorporated into the final composite textural-structural description.

The second phase of analysis entailed a thematic analysis using Boyatzis' (1998) three-step, theory-driven approach for transforming qualitative data. The theory driving the analysis was Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's (1995) 4S framework for analyzing adults in transition. This provided a clearer understanding of what is happening to those experiencing a stalled career.

#### *Limitations*

There are four limitations to this study. First, the collected data may have only included data that was consistent with researcher expectations. Second, although the interview protocol was semi-structured, with open-ended questions, the data collected from the participants may have been limited by the questions asked. Third, conclusions may only fit with researcher preconceptions. The data may be subject to other interpretations. Fourth, purposive sampling limits the findings. This study is not generalizable to all males, nor is it generalizable to all white males, nor is it generalizable to white males in Federal employment.

## **Results**

Although the experience of each individual is unique, phenomenological analysis reveals those elements of the experience that are invariant, essential, and transcend the specific individual experiences on which they are based. The result is a description of the essential structure of the experience being investigated (Polkinghorne, 1989). Rather than thick, rich description, the objective for the phenomenologist is to distill the data down into the essence of the experience. A first person narrative helps the reader relate to the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The resulting composite description of the essence of the stalled career experience follows below.

I've consistently had good performance appraisals with no complaints or negative comments, so I assume that my bosses think I've done an okay job. Then, an awareness that things are no longer the way they were sets in, emerging from a series of incidents of preferential treatment of women and minorities and unfair treatment of white males. I realize that I'm not gonna get ahead. It's personal. Women and minorities get something just for being who they are rather than what they do, while doing a good job and getting good evaluations doesn't help me. I've been shoved aside for the sake of diversity.

This is about being passed over while other people, by nature of their sex or race, manage to get things that I don't or can't because of management saying, "We have to promote those people. You may be worthy, but you're the wrong sex, wrong color." Things are supposed to be neutral, based on qualifications or experience. But then another factor that you don't have comes in. And it's not because of your lack of knowledge or lack of qualifications. I've been told, "I really want you, but I have to consider these others, and when I make that determination I have to also write a letter to justify why I chose you over them. And it has to be centered around, not that you're male and they're female or whatever. It has to be based on qualifications, even though it's kind of made up." If a woman or a minority is picked, no justification is required.

I'm confused and disgruntled by the awkwardness of the situation. I don't understand why it's happening. It doesn't make any sense. There should be one set of rules for everyone, not double standards. It's not fair. I'm treated differently and disadvantaged. The playing field is tilted, and the tilt has gone too far. It's not supposed to be this way. I feel like I wasted a good part of my career working hard and thinking I'm going to get ahead, only to find that I'm in the wrong age for being a white male. I feel disheartened, used, and angry.

I'm disillusioned by management's push for diversity. The organization is getting pressure from above to increase the numbers of women and minorities to fill quotas, no matter what it takes, even if it overshadows the

focus on getting the job done. Management does what it wants, when it wants. It may not be official policy to increase the numbers, but that seems to be what is happening. I'm expendable. It's very disconcerting and demoralizing to find no one pulling for me. It's hard to get motivated to trust management, let alone support them. When I question people about this, they blame upper management, humor me with lip service, or deny any unfair treatment. Management's lack of support has reinforced my sense of betrayal. My trust is gone. I was happy about my job. Now, I've become somewhat cynical and paranoid, knowing what should happen and then seeing what actually does.

This is not about the system. It's about people who work in the system— who understand it, know how to manipulate it, and use it to their advantage. Managers carry out the policy. They run the system. It creates an organization of contradictions, which adversely affects morale. It's also about being PC— the mindset of being sensitive to race and gender so that you aren't offending any group. Management is concerned that their record might not look good and it might hurt their career. They're afraid of being accused of being discriminatory so they sponsor a woman or minority and try and further that person's career because that's proof that they're not discriminatory. Things get made into a racial or gender issue without any reason. If a supervisor takes action against a minority or a female, it's immediately, "You're being racist" or "You're being sexist." Some women threaten they're going to quit, or claim discrimination or harassment, to get what they want. Same with some minorities. Consequently, they get supporters and a lot of individual attention. They get mentors, where a white male wouldn't. They get opportunities, without having to go through tough rites of passage. They get selected over more experienced, senior guys who have already completed training. Sometimes the standards for a position are lowered. Even if they're unqualified or incompetent, they're making it into the pool of candidates to ensure that there is representation.

I don't have any control over this situation. "You have the benefit of knowing what's going to happen but you don't have the benefit of being able to utilize that knowledge to change the outcome." It's undesirable and unmanageable. I can't help that I was born a white male. I'm not racist. I've not discriminated. Why should I be punished? Other guys I've talked with had a similar reaction: commiseration and empathy that we can't do anything about it, yet we can't talk openly because it's not PC. I can't bring this up with women or minorities because they don't want to hear about it or they like to think I'm being discriminated just like they've been. I could complain to EEO, but it wouldn't matter. Nothing would happen. Civil Rights was set up to back the female or minority. I don't have any protection. It's not written, but it's spoken behind the scenes, "White males don't have any rights."

This situation makes me apprehensive and uncertain about my future. I don't want special treatment. I just want to be considered equally, where everyone gets the opportunity. Now, my career aspirations are gone; my expectations diminished. I don't really care anymore. Sure, I'll still do a good job, but I've lost interest in putting forth any extra effort when I know that the rewards I should get are not forthcoming. I've got less enthusiasm and lost any incentive to excel because of the bitter taste in my mouth. Cynicism is balanced with pragmatism. I want things to be normal again, but I know that those days are gone. The situation "leaves you having to decide whether you want to continue in a nonsensical environment" or leave. I finally regained some sense of control when I left.

## Conclusions & Recommendations

There are five primary conclusions about the phenomenological findings. First, the contemporary environment plays a substantial role in precipitating the stalled career. Second, the stalled career is about some white males comparing their situation to women and minorities, while not blaming women and minorities for the situation. Third, the stalled career experience includes a substantial shift toward externality in locus of control, both from the perceived lack of control over the situation and the white male's choice to relinquish control as a coping strategy. Fourth, the undiscussable nature of the experience impedes making sense of the situation. Organizational undiscussables, a form of defensive routine (Argyris, 1992), breed tension, add to role conflict and ambiguity, and lead to inconsistent practices that foster concerns about equity, diversity, and fair treatment. Fifth, the experience has a negative impact on the organization, as well as the individual having the experience.

Viewed through the lens of transitions theory, regular overarching patterns emerged and enhanced understanding of the stalled career experience. These patterns provided three primary conclusions about the transition. First, the data confirm that the nature of the stalled career is a non-event work transition. Second, while support systems are used as a coping resource, the primary form of support was other white males whose support tended to reinforce being in the transition rather than encourage successful navigation through the transition. Third, the stalled career provides an example of a transition in which the duration may be sustained or the outcome

uncertain due to the balance in coping assets and liabilities being in a state of equilibrium. Transitions theory suggests that a middle aged white male experiencing a stalled career will use his coping resources to ensure a positive transition outcome. Where this is the case, coping assets greater than coping liabilities tips the balance, resulting in a positive transition outcome. It is not clear that this occurs for those experiencing a stalled career.

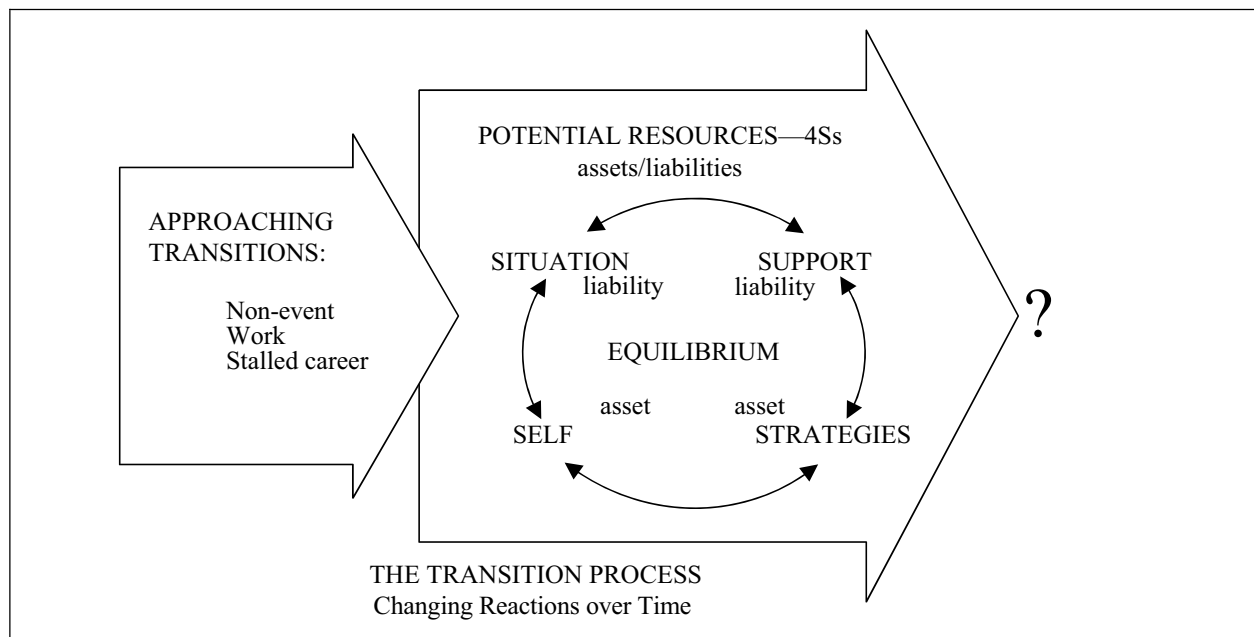


Figure 1. *Analysis of the Non-Event Work Transition of a Stalled Career*

Participants indicated the situation and support were liabilities (see Figure 1). Those experiencing a stalled career perceived the situation as the most detrimental of the 4Ss. The situation was forced upon them, was undesirable, and was unmanageable. Individuals experiencing a transition often need a new network of relationships to enhance their ability to navigate the transition (Schlossberg, 1981), but support systems for a successful navigation of the stalled career were deficient.

Participants indicated the self and strategies were assets. Although participants felt they cannot control the situation, they said they can control who they are and the way in which they react to the situation. Individuals experiencing a transition often need a new way of seeing themselves to enhance their ability to navigate the transition (Schlossberg, 1981). The stalled career forced a new way of seeing oneself, including changes in sense of control and shift in self-esteem. Those experiencing a stalled career maintained a high sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem despite the shift toward externality in locus of control over their career advancement. Although those experiencing a stalled career could not manage the environment, they were able to manage their strategies for coping with the environment. Coping strategies included “moving beyond it” and regaining a positive attitude.

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) note that “[a] transition is not so much a matter of change as of the individual’s perception of the change” (p. 28). A positive transition outcome can occur if the individual perceives the change as an opportunity to redirect career goals and priorities, explore career alternatives, develop new competencies, or find a more satisfying job (Eby & Buch, 1995). Career growth represents a positive outcome to a work transition. This did not always occur for the white males experiencing a stalled career.

At times, the white males experiencing a stalled career reduced their work effort. This coping strategy was passive-aggressive behavior. This dysfunctional strategy is consistent with studies of violation of the psychological contract (Robinson & Morrison, 2002). The strategy marked a shift from transformational to transactional relationship behaviors between the white male experiencing the stalled career and his supervisor. The stalled career was seen as a negative experience, both during and after.

It is difficult to conclude that the stalled career transition resulted in a positive outcome because of the conflicting data indicating the transition is complete. For example, George entered his transition in 1989 and he perceived that he completed the transition in 1995. He has moved on to a different job in a different organization, so it appears that he is no longer experiencing a stalled career, yet he still feels that women and minorities are getting ahead without merit. He appears to feel the situation still exists and to feel the same way about it. Alternatively, the

perception of a stalled career may itself be symptomatic of a negative outcome of some white males' non-event work transition. He got through the stalled career, but the violation to the psychological contract of employment erased his trust and left him with a "bitter taste" regarding his employment.

These conditions place the balance of coping assets and liabilities in a state of equilibrium. This state of equilibrium does not mean the individual cannot function. Despite the perceived loss of control over the issue of career progression, those experiencing a stalled career take charge or maintain control in other areas of their lives.

### **Contribution to New Knowledge in HRD**

This study generated new knowledge on the stalled career construct by describing and enhancing understanding of the stalled career. The results reveal a stalled career as a global construct, having cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. Aspects of the construct include attitude toward affirmative action (AA) and workforce diversity efforts, concerns about self-interests, reaction to organizational change, sense of equity, and work transition. This study exemplified one way that social dominance theory plays out in the contemporary workplace. The findings suggest that the perception of having a stalled career is a hierarchy enhancing force acting to counterbalance gains made by the hierarchy attenuating forces of AA and diversity programming. As a hierarchy enhancing force, the perception of having a stalled career leads to a lack of support for organizational efforts to promote social equality but it does not appear to lead to displaced aggression against women and minorities.

This study provided empirical research on Schlossberg's transitions theory within the context of the contemporary workplace. It also provided empirical research on work transitions occurring at midlife, in general, and for white males, in particular. Although transitions theory assumes a transition outcome, either positive or negative, the results of this study suggests that that assumption may not hold true for the non-event transition of a stalled career. Further research may reveal this is a generalized expectancy for all non-event transitions.

This study also makes a minor contribution to the careers literature. The white male experiencing a stalled career perceives that his career has stalled in comparison to female and minority colleagues. The findings in this study differ from Pelled, Eisenhardt, and Xin's (1999) study indicating that the work transition process is more highly connected to age, tenure, and functional background than to race and gender. In a social comparison process, such as the experience of a stalled career, diversity in race and gender may have stronger negative associations with group conflict than diversity in age, tenure, and functional background.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Engels (1995) calls out the need for the "identification of general and specific implications for theory and practice working with humans of all ages and stages of career development, especially in terms of preventive strategies" (p. 84). This study identified theoretical implications of the stalled career. The results also yielded recommended strategies for practical application.

#### *Recommendations for the Organization*

Resistance to planned change is a major issue that organizational leadership and change agents must address (Blake, 1992). Due to workplace change, workers feel rejected and suffer loss of face. The collective insecurity experienced by workers manifests itself as feeling trapped, frightened, or isolated. Sadness, anger, denial and fear are also evident. Keeping employees informed in general, and especially regarding the rationale and objectives for planned change, would likely help minimize the disorientation, such as that manifest as a stalled career.

Employees' sense of control is an issue in the reluctance of employees to embrace organizational change (Blake, 1992). Individual employees, including white males, must have some sense that planned change will work, reflected in a significant positive expectancy to his or her effort and a significant positive instrumentality to his or her performance. A greater sense of control among employee comes from involvement and communication to build cohesiveness, collaboration, establishing community norms of acceptance, involvement in problem solving and decision making, and participatory intervention. These actions unify by reinforcing common interests and diminishing the potentially divisive ingroup/outgroup dynamics evident in the stalled career experience.

#### *Recommendations for Functional Practitioners*

Functional practitioners (e.g., HR specialist, EEO/AA director, diversity program manager) must address the collective and individual needs of employees, including white males, by assisting in the successful navigation of any work transition. The results suggests that the functional practitioner can provide guidance and support to organizational change agents and all employees, with the emphasis on helping people cope with change. Practitioners should contribute to the understanding of ingroup/outgroup dynamics. The primary objective should be to remove the stigma of organizational undiscussable by getting people talking.

The results of this study also have implications for career counselors and therapists. The perception of a lack of career development appears to be a substantial factor in the stalled career experience. "As Americans deal with the reality of the shortened corporate ladder and organizations grapple with ethical and logistical issues in downsizing, the identification of factors that foster career growth ... are critical for individual and organizational survival" (Eby & Buch, 1995, p. 41). Where white males experiencing a stalled career exhibit dysfunctional behaviors because of feeling disenfranchised, practitioners must develop strategies for ensuring that any dysfunctional aspects of the experience are minimized. In these times of rapid change, promoting career growth is as crucial for organizations, as it is for individuals (Engels, 1995). This study provided empirical evidence on the relationship between the factors that sustain career development and the unanticipated non-event work transition of a stalled career.

While competition over scarce resources (e.g., job benefits, promotional opportunities) can lead to discrimination in times of change, cooperative interdependence can lead to more favorable intergroup behaviors (Sherif, 1966). Practitioners can play a major role in promoting positive intergroup relations by promoting a work environment of cooperative interdependence. One strategy would be focusing on the career development and advancement interests of *all* employees and reemphasizing merit. Formal mentoring programs would add social support to the mix.

Diversity program managers can ensure that program efforts leverage all aspects of diversity to enhance organizational effectiveness. Programs must take a broader, more inclusive approach by looking beyond representation and demographic differences (e.g., race, gender) to the organizational objective of maximizing the cooperative efforts of all employees toward the common interest of mission accomplishment. If we do not help white males adjust to the changed workplace, they will disengage, thereby compromising the desired benefit that workforce diversity brings to the workplace (Rifkin, 1994).

#### *Recommendations for Supervisors*

Supervisors, as front-line managers, must select employees for limited advancement opportunities and are charged with creating other developmental opportunities for their subordinates. Organizational effectiveness is dependent on optimal use of human resources. Supervisors are those in the workplace with the most direct opportunity to influence individuals experiencing a stalled career.

Supervisors can mitigate, if not prevent, the experience of a stalled career through visible and supportive management behaviors. Three things might help. First, supervisors can more actively support organizational change rather than "blaming" upper management (i.e., "This change might actually help us do the job more efficiently." rather than, "I know this change is stupid, but management is being PC. I don't want to do it, but they told us we had to."). Second, supervisors can take a more active role in challenging white males to adapt to the changed workplace (i.e., "I can understand that you may not like the way things have changed, but nevertheless they have. What can I do to help you adjust?"). Third, supervisors can do a better job of routinely providing constructive feedback to white males, particularly those who are performing below par (i.e., "This is where you can do better. Let's look how you can improve so you're considered for promotion." rather than, "You're doing okay. It's just that management wants to get women in the job.").

#### *Recommendations for White Males*

The results of this study have benefit to white males experiencing a stalled career, as well as any other individuals who experience the work transition of a plateaued career at midlife. Career progression is no longer assured for anyone. To prevent the stalled career or to successfully navigate work transition, the white male must reflect on his career aspirations and assumptions. Katz (1998) talks about today's turbulent times driven by change, identifies the individual's role as organizational change agent, and specifies that the individual's role is enhanced by the transformative role of education and continuous learning. Without learning, growth and development is stunted. Engels (1995) particularly emphasizes the need for self-renewal in the face of a work transition. Successfully managing the change involved with work transition demands self-reflection and self-efficacy (Eby & Buch, 1995). The results of this study provide a challenge to engage in reflective practice regarding enhancing one's career progression and sense of self-efficacy.

### **Summary**

This study described the stalled career experience and its impact on the contemporary workplace. It confirmed that a stalled career is evidence of some white males' negative reaction toward factors that are changing the workplace and resulting in the perception of unfair and discriminatory practices. The stalled career is an organizational undiscussable and, as such, making sense of and adjusting to the changed workplace is difficult. Sensemaking is further impeded by deficient support systems; chiefly other white males who provide empathic support to those

experiencing a stalled career but minimal challenge to change the situation. The situation leaves frustrated and disenfranchised individuals unable to effectively make a work transition.

The stalled career experience has a negative impact on the workplace by being divisive and drawing energies away from mission accomplishment. The conclusions in no way suggest that the stalled career should displace other issues of race and gender already evident in research and practice; chiefly, the history of discrimination against women and minorities. The conclusions suggest, however, that white males are just as susceptible to perceptions of inequity and discrimination, and that their perceptions can manifest in negative attitudes and behaviors that are detrimental to organizational effectiveness. White males remain the largest percentage of the American workforce. In large part, they also continue to hold positions of power and influence. The results of this exploratory study provide an imperative for understanding and addressing the stalled career experience due to its own merits, as well as its interdependence with the ultimate resolution of other race and gender issues.

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